

Notes on High School Literature.—II.

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Tom Brown's School Days at Rugby.

It is not enough to say of "Tom Brown" that it is the best school story in the English language. It stands in a class by itself among school stories. It gives an interesting picture of life at a real and famous school, and a portrait under no disguise, and generally admitted to be true to life, of a great headmaster. But aside from this interest, it has positive merits as a story; merits of construction, of characterization, and of style. One of the aims in studying it should be to find out what these merits are.

A story of this length cannot, like a Shakspeare play, be read through in class, and I suppose the method adopted by most teachers is to have certain chapters read aloud in school, to assign others to be read at home, and to set questions, suggestions and subjects for composition writing. As in the study of "As You Like It" recommended in the last REVIEW, the members of the class can be grouped, and the questions, etc., adapted in difficulty and kinds of interest, to each group. An attempt should be made to give all pupils some grasp of the principles of the construction of a story, so that they will be able to apply them in their own reading. They should be led to find out for themselves that what the author gives us is not a mere string of more or less connected incidents, each interesting in itself, but incidents carefully selected and arranged to bring out the point he wants to make *i. e.*, Dr. Arnold's influence on the individual boy. Here are some points which will repay study:

What proportion of the book is given to Tom's life before he goes to Rugby? What do we learn about him from these chapters? Are all the incidents in them of importance to the story? Do any passages in them suggest that Hughes was dwelling on the scenes and characters because of his own love for them, or indulging in his favourite occupation of preaching? Get clearly in mind all the incidents of Rugby life, all Tom's experiences, *in order*, and all the people who influence him in any way, up to the end of Part I. Note the effect upon him of each incident. Is he getting better or worse, or standing still?

Part II begins with a definite statement that here is the turning point. Notice the chapter headings. Is it usual for the turning point, or crisis, of a story to come so near the middle? Does the interest fall off after this, or does it keep up to the end? Are there any incidents that might be left out? Note what Hughes says about his reasons for putting in Ch. V., "The Fight." Is there

any other reason why it should be there? Does it throw any light on Tom's character? And does it make any difference in his life. Where do you place the climax of the story?

Some of the more striking narrative passages had better be read aloud by the teacher, or by some very good reader (if there be such a one) in the class; *e. g.*, Tom's Journey to Rugby; The Football Match; The Singing in the School House Hall; Hare and Hounds. These are excellent examples of narration, though the first falls off at the end. Note how from "Anything for us, Bob?" (p. 51) to "as the town clock strikes eight" moves rapidly on, and then how the guard's stories about the Rugby boys interrupt the movement. Also, how at the end of the chapter, we are taken away from the coach altogether, to go back to it in Ch. V. The other passages are more closely knit; compare them. And with the account of the journey compare David Copperfield's stage coach journey, and Tom Pinch's in "Martin Chuzzlewit."

Make a careful character study of Dr. Arnold. Do we see any other side of him than the head master? Pick out all the different scenes in which he appears. What does each tell us about him? Collect all the things that are said about him by other characters in the story. All the passages in which Hughes describes him. Is he represented as a *perfect* character? Study the growth, or development, of character in Tom, East, and Arthur. Note all the steps in Tom's education from babyhood. Compare the ways in which he was treated by his father and by the Doctor? (Do they try to repress or to stimulate him?) Do you think that Tom's treatment of Arthur is quite natural? Study this carefully before answering. What incident in Tom's early school life would, perhaps, give him sympathy for Arthur? Does Hughes show his belief in heredity? Collect illustrations of Tom's sense of honour, beginning with his sticking to Jacob Doodlecalf in trouble. What theories of education had Squire Brown? How many women are there in the story, and what parts do they play? Does Hughes describe the personal appearance of his characters? Give examples of the author's direct preaching, and see what he says about it in his preface. (Introduction, p. xxviii. McMillan's Pocket Classics.) What is his definition of "boyishness"? What does he say is the worst sin to a boy's mind?

Besides the character studies suggested above, the following subjects might be set for compositions:

Tom's amusements: (a) As a child; (b) At his first school. Rugby games. Fagging at Rugby. A Jingling match. Back swording. The Doctor's sermons. The story of the Duck. Changes in the school made by Dr. Arnold.

The quotations which head the chapters. "Our own Rugby poet." Rugby heroes. Lessons at Rugby. Hughes' opinion of fights. The "triste tupus" episode. Tom's friends at home and at school. Rugby slang. Tom's interviews with the Doctor.

[Most teachers probably find it profitable to read school stories, but good ones are rare. H. A. Vachell's "The Hill," may be recommended. It is said to give as good a picture of Harrow as "Tom Brown" does of Rugby. The school